

Introduction (ch. 1)

- The authority of St. Thomas in this study stems from the repeated insistence of the Church throughout the centuries for the careful study of his synthesis of theology.
 - Aquinas possesses the heights of acquired wisdom which enabled him to wonderfully synthesize the knowledge of the philosopher and the theologian, and the gift of wisdom raised him to the highest degree of infused contemplation
 - Overall, Aquinas' synthesis points to the fact that *the precept of the love of God is limitless and that the perfection of charity falls under this precept toward which every Christian must work according to state* (Sts. Francis de Sales, Augustine, and other Church Fathers hold the same position).
- The authority of St. John of the Cross is recognized as well.
 - He is certainly one of the greatest Catholic mystics and, as a canonized saint, his doctrine underwent a harsh scrutiny by the Church and was declared perfectly sound.
 - He unites the data on descriptive mysticism and the speculative theology of the virtues and gifts (as laid out by Aquinas) from his knowledge of Tradition and intimacy with the works of St. Teresa of Avila.
 - He is fully in agreement with Aquinas on the great questions of predestination and grace.
- The goal of the treatise is to explain the unitive way which is often greatly misunderstood or abused.
 - Various errors are due to adherence to unsound theology, while others are due to ignorance and/or *the desire to remain ignorant*, considering perfection to be an ideal too lofty for the common priest, religious, or layman.
 - Study of the writings of the great saints is neglected under the false pretense that these are beyond reach and can lead to divergent opinions (mystical agnosticism) as to whether contemplation is part of the normal way of sanctity.
 - Benedict XV refutes this: *In our day many neglect the supernatural life and cultivate in its place an inconsistent and vague sentimentalism. Hence it is absolutely necessary to recall more often what the fathers of the Church, together with Holy Scripture, have taught us on this subject, and to do so by taking St. Thomas Aquinas especially as our guide, because he has so clearly set forth their doctrine on the elevation of the supernatural life. We must earnestly draw the attention of souls to the conditions required for the progress of the grace of the virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the perfect development of which is found in the mystical life.* (Letter to editor of *Ta vie spirituelle*, 15 September 1921).
- Hence it shall be demonstrated that the conception of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways, as ultimately synthesized by St. John of the Cross, preserves all the grandeur of the Gospels, Pauline, and Johannine epistles.
 - The *purgative way* entails the orienting of life towards heaven and an ever-increasing dying to sin (cf. Col 3:5,10; Rom 6:4-6; 12:2; Gal 5:24; Jn 12:24).
 - The *illuminative way* entails an increasing perfection of knowledge of God with increasing charity (cf. Col 3:10-14; Eph 4:1-6; Gal 2:9; Phil 2:5; 3:8; 1 Cor 11:1; Rom 6:4-11).
 - The *unitive way* marks the state of a continued union with Christ by supernatural grace and perfection of virtues (cf. Col 3:1-4,15-17).

The Actual Mystical Problem (ch. 2)

- A.1. *Object and method of ascetical and mystical theology.*
 - The meaning of ascetical and mystical theology.
 - Modern times have seen an exaggerated distinction between moral and dogmatic theology, as moral theology has degenerated into a science of sins to be avoided rather than of virtues to be developed and practiced.
 - This development is a departure from the *habitus* of Aquinas who maintained that sacred doctrine is absolutely one and is of such high perfection that it contains the perfection of both dogmatic and moral theology (1a q.1 a.2, 8); hence *sacra doctrina* is eminently speculative and practical.
 - With this in mind, moral theology contains the principles necessary for leading souls to the highest sanctity; hence ascetical and mystical theology *is the application of moral theology to the direction of the souls towards ever-closer union with God.*
 - This presupposes what *sacra doctrina* teaches about the nature and properties of the theological and moral virtues, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, while also studying the laws and conditions of their progress from the *ratio* of perfection.
 - Consideration of the terms *ascetical* and *mystical* *sa. themselves.*
 - *Asceticism* comes from the Greek indicating the exercise of virtues; hence it belongs to the part of theology which directs souls in the struggle against sin and the progress of virtue.
 - *Mysticism* pertains to the treatment of more hidden and mysterious things, *viz.* intimate union of the soul with God, transitory phenomena accompanying certain degrees of union, and essentially extraordinary graces (e.g. visions).
 - From this, the *object* of ascetical and mystical theology is clear: that being, *Christian perfection, union with God, the contemplation which this presupposes, the ordinary means leading to it, and the extraordinary helps favoring it.*

- o Principles of ascetical and mystical theology.
 - The principles are easy to discern in light of the object.
 - The light of revelation contained in Holy Writ and Tradition is explained by the teaching authority of the Church and connected upon by dogmatic and moral theology.
 - From the principles of faith, theology deduces the conclusions that they implicitly contain.
 - By the light of these principles, the facts of the ascetical and mystical life must be examined, and, by this light, the rules of direction must be formulated (as something more, however, than unmotivated practical prescriptions).
- o Critique of methodology.
 - *Descriptive or inductive method (analytical)*: This method, while making use of sound theology on the life of grace, seeks to describe the different spiritual and mystical states *by their signs rather than to determine their nature theologically* (doctrinally and morally founded), examining whether they proceed from the Christian virtues and gifts of the Holy Ghost.
 - The drawback is obvious here as this method only treats of one part of the science; hence the rules of direction formulated from this method are often too empirical and lack sufficient justification and/or clarification.
 - Action follows upon being and nature, *so knowledge of the nature of the interior life and not just its signs and appearances is necessary to determine practical direction.*
 - Those who hold to this method, in order to supply for its lack of doctrinal foundation, provide a *nominal* definition of the mystical state which declares it as extraordinary as the particular charisms sometimes associated with it.
 - o Hence, these proponents *determine the nature of the mystical state without the consultation of theology* and fail to consider whether or not it is a perfection of sanctity.
 - o Exclusive use of this method leads to a greater emphasis on experimental psychology rather than theology, which results in the failure to consider faith in the explanations of mystical phenomena; such use disregards the distinction between Christian doctrine and life and the concomitant signs of miracles and prophecies which serve to confirm its divine origin.
 - o Treatment of mystical theology as a science with principles of its own is an impoverishment; it must be set forth by the great principles of theology.
 - *Deductive method (synthetical)*: This method falls to the other extreme and considers only the harmony of Christian life and doctrine, thus giving no credence to the concomitant phenomena indicative of certain degrees of mystical union.
 - This method tends to simplify everything, deducing the solutions of the most difficult problems of spirituality by proceeding solely from the Thomistic doctrine about the infused virtues and gifts with no consideration for the various degrees of the spiritual life.
 - *A combination of the two*: This method falls in the mean between the descriptive and deductive methods:
 - The nature of Christian perfection is to first be determined *by the use of theological principles*, including an analysis of the concepts of the Christian life, perfection, and holiness as furnished by the Gospels.
 - The nature of contemplation is determined next, as this follows from the state of the perfect, including the ordinary means leading to it and the extraordinary helps that follow it.
 - Third, a description of the facts of the ascetical and mystical life by a study of the testimonies of saints who have best revealed and experienced them.
 - Fourth, a determination of the nature of the facts or interior states and a distinguishing from the concomitant and auxiliary phenomena.
 - Finally, a synthesis of the concepts and facts in the light of evangelical perfection which shows: 1) what is essential to Christian perfection and what is contrary to it, and; 2) what is necessary or very desirable to reach it and what is essentially extraordinary and not required.

A.2 Distinction between ascetical theology and mystical theology and the unity of spiritual doctrine.

- o Traditional thesis: unity of spiritual doctrine (this is the correct thesis).
 - Until the 18th century, it was generally held that mystical theology included not only mystical union, infused contemplation, its degrees and extraordinary graces accompanying it, but also *Christian perfection in general*, hence the normal progress of the spiritual life seemed directed toward mystical union as the culminating point.
 - Overall, it was a spiritual doctrine dominated by a very high idea of perfection that was realized by its proportion to charity proceeding from the gift of wisdom.

- St. Thomas demonstrates the relation between ascetical theology and mystical theology by treating of the mutual relation of action and contemplation (IIaIIae q.182 aa.3,4).
 - The active life (exercise of the cardinal virtues and outward acts of charity) prepares for the contemplative life by regulating the passions and increasing love for God and neighbor.
 - The contemplation of God (proper to the perfect) then leads to action, directs it, and renders such acts much more fruitful and supernatural.
 - Hence, asceticism does not cease with the beginning of the contemplative life, but like the formation of a habit which makes one act more promptly and easily, the exercise of different virtues becomes truly superior with the reception of mystical graces of union with God.
- St. Thomas further lays out principles regarding the unity between doctrine and the spiritual life.
 - Christian perfection consists in union with God, which supposes the full development of charity and the virtues, along with the gifts of the Holy Ghost.
 - The three theological virtues are supernatural in their essence because of their formal motive and proper object, which is unattainable by reason alone (or the highest natural knowledge of angels).
 - The gifts of the Holy Ghost are doubly supernatural in their essence *and* mode of action; the state of perfect fidelity to the Holy Ghost (habitual influence of His gifts) places the soul in a passive state.
 - The gifts grow with charity, as do the infused virtues, and this happens by meritorious works and fruitful Holy Communion; if the soul does not advance, it retards, since the first principle of charity has no limit.
 - Consideration of what the very essence of the grace of Baptism and charity ought to be (not what actually may happen) points to the case that grace should not be lost.
 - o The life of grace should normally develop to the extent that the fire of charity would purify us of all actual sins prior to death.
 - o Immediate vision of God after death is of the radical order and thus the painful purification of sin should precede death and be wholly meritorious; hence, mystical union should be the normal development of the life of grace: the perfect tend principally to unite themselves with God in order to enjoy Him, and they desire to die in order to be with Christ, (cf. IIaIIae q.24 a.9)
- St. John of the Cross further expresses the unity between doctrine and spiritual life, even despite the diversity of interior states, by focusing on the quality of the supernatural virtue of faith.
 - Supernatural contemplation is the full development of the life of faith and of the spirit of wisdom: faith alone is the proximate and proportionate means which can unite the soul to God. (cf. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, ch. 2,3,8)
- The unity of spiritual doctrine follows a definite course of study: 1) the end attainable in this life is defined; 2) what constitutes spiritual perfection, especially with reference to the Gospel and the testimony of saints, and; 3) clear depiction of what the means are to the end: struggle against sin, practice of virtues, docility to the Holy Ghost.
 - Thus the aspects of asceticism prepare the soul for mystical union (fruition of the gifts) and the two are closely linked; any separation of the two (as proposed below by the modern thesis) results in an asceticism that lacks vitality' and depth and a mysticism that that seems wholly out of reach except for a few.
- o Modern thesis: separation of ascetical from mystical theology (this is not so good).
 - In the 18th century, a number of authors sought to separate ascetical from mystical theology due to abuses springing from erroneous teaching of the mystical ways (which became suspect after the condemnations of the errors of Molinos) and due to an excessive zeal to systematize things and establish a doctrine to remedy' abuses and classify things materially.
 - Ascetical theology was relegated to treat of the "ordinary" Christian life according to the stages of purgation, illumination, and union, while mystical theology' was relegated to treating only of extraordinary graces and auxiliary phenomena associated with the union.
 - Hence, mystical union, due to this division, was no longer viewed as the culmination or end of the normal development of the life sanctifying grace, virtues, and the gifts.
 - o Ultimately, this is the result of a misconception of the virtue of humility in that it was thought presumptuous to aim so high, as mystical union was thought only to be a grace *gratis datae*.

- o Aquinas answers this question by maintaining the infinite elevation of grace above our nature and also the harmony between the two; the harmony, however, only really appears after a profound purification of nature by mortification and love of the Cross.

A.2. *Mystical theology and the essentially supernatural character of infused faith.*

- o The cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) are infused and essentially distinct from the highest acquired virtues because of their formal object (e.g., there is an infinite distance between acquired temperance as regulated by reason and Christian temperance ruled by faith, as the measure of faith provides for what unaided reason is ignorant of, such as love of God, sin and its effects, etc.).
 - Furthermore, progressive purification is necessary in order that the Christian moral virtues, aided by the acquired virtues, may reach their perfection.
- o Faith is substantially supernatural, specified by a formal motive of the same entirely supernatural order, a motive that faith attains in an absolutely infallible manner.
 - Rational knowledge of the signs of revelation play only the part of a preamble to prepare our intellect to receive the influence of grace, which alone can make us adhere to the formal motive of faith and the authority of God revealing.
 - The first revealing Truth is at once that which is believed and that by which one believes, as light is that which one sees and principle by which one sees.
 - Faith not only grants certainty to what unaided reason can know about God, but also concerns belief in God considered in His intimate life (cf. Ilallae q.1 a.1; q.4 a.1; q.5 a.1; *De Vert.* q.14 a.8).
 - Thus, our faith is based on the very truth of God; true faith places man in the presence of the Gospel in the same way a listener with musical sense can perceive the beauty of a sublime symphony (hence, no incorrupt sense of Holy Writ can be found outside the Church).
 - Three things lead us to believe in Christ, those being 1) natural reason; 2) testimony of the law and prophets, and; 3) preaching of the Apostles; thus led, we reach belief because of the very truth of God to which we adhere firmly under the influence of an infused divine light, because faith has its certitude from this (cf. Aquinas' *Comm. in joannem* IV, 5, 2).
 - The opinion contrary to this rests on a mechanical conception of infused faith and appropriates the exterior act of revelation as only a partial motive of faith; faith appears as a deductive process helping us to discover the truth of its contents, which evidently lessens its transcendental character.
- o The absolute supernatural character of the formal motive of the theological virtues demonstrates that mystical contemplation is truly the plenitude of the life of faith.
 - As St. John of the Cross writes, pure faith and detachment in darkness from sensible goods and memories stimulates and raises the soul much more to love of God without the soul's knowing how or whence it comes. (*Ascent* II, 24)
 - Supernatural transformation of the soul to intimate union with God requires a period of severe purification by which the soul remains in darkness, forcing it to rely on obscure faith as its light and guide, which dominates all its ideas, tastes, sentiments, and images; the soul actually hinders its progress in this stage if it seeks to rely on its own reasoning or is attached to its own judgment and will. (*Ascent* II, 4)
 - At this stage, distraction of the mind with things that are clear and of little value stunts the access to the abyss of faith where God secretly and supernaturally instructs the soul and enriches it with virtues and gifts; the most perfect recollection takes place in faith and it is here that the Holy Ghost communicates His light within this domain entirely.
 - St. Thomas supports this, together with St. Albert the Great: Then we know God through ignorance, by a union which surpasses the nature of our soul and in which we are enlightened by the depths of divine wisdom, which we cannot scrutinize. (*I Sent.* d.8 q.1 a.1 ad5)
 - o Thus it is evident that, based on the essentially supernatural character of faith, mystical contemplation is the normal blossoming of the theological virtues united to charity and the gifts of the Holy Ghost.
- o The acts and gifts of the Holy Ghost are doubly supernatural, both as to their substance and mode.
 - Although the gifts are subordinate to the theological virtues, they greatly assist in their development since the Holy Ghost communicates His lights to us in the recollection of faith; thus there is a great difference between supernatural faith subsisting *without charity* and *living faith* aided by the gifts.

A.3. *Mystical theology and the doctrine of St. Thomas on the efficacy of grace.*

- o Grace is efficacious in itself.

- Free determination is the most important part of the work of satisfaction, for this distinguishes the just from the sinner in every salutary act; however, this distinction is not exclusive to us and must include the work of God in all its facets, for if God were in no way the cause of our choice, He would not be able to foresee it infallibly from all eternity: *For if it is God who worketh in you, both to will and accomplish according to His good will.* (Phil 2:13).
- Both the faculty of the will and its operation come from God; grace then must be efficacious in itself and not by reason of the consent following it.
 - Divine grace, which efficaciously inclines us to salutary good, is not indifferent or changeable, nor is it made efficacious by our foreseen consent, but moves us to follow the way of good without violating our liberty.
 - Sin alone can be referred to man exclusively, since by the fact that it is a privation it only requires a defectible or deficient cause.
- No one who possesses use of reason is deprived of efficacious grace needed for salvation, except for having freely resisted a sufficient grace, that is, as good inspiration recalling the duty to be accomplished; God is *not* obliged to remedy our voluntary faults, although He does often even when they are repeated.
 - *Trent* (Sess. VI, ch. 13): If men do not resist His grace, as God has begun in them the work of salvation, He will pursue its accomplishment by working in them both to will and accomplish.
- o This transcendental efficacy of grace produces in us and with us the free mode of our acts.
 - Ultimately, it is a mystery of how the very efficacy of grace moves the free will without doing violence to it.
 - Since the divine will is perfectly efficacious, it follows that things happen that God wills to happen, but also happen in the way (either necessarily or contingently and freely) He so wills. (1a q.83 a.1 ad3)
 - It does not of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself; God thus is the first cause who moves both natural and voluntary causes.
 - o As by moving natural causes, God does not prevent their acts from being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not prevent them from being voluntary; thus He is the cause of this very being in them, as He operates in everything according to its nature.
 - o The perfect efficacy of God's power immutably moves our will, but liberty remains because the will's nature is ordered to the universal good and not particular which it is indifferent towards (*De Maio* q.6 a.1 ad3)); as nature is specified by the object, so God cannot change the object of the will without changing the nature.
 - Divine motion of grace does no violence to the will since it exercises itself interiorly according to the natural inclination of our will toward the universal good, which comes from God.
 - Nor does this diminish holy effort and good will, for grace causes us to make this choice and to struggle with temptation and overcome it; God moves us, not that we should do nothing, but that we should act (we are not quietists).
- o A good act comes entirely from God as first cause and entirely from man as second cause.
 - God from all eternity wills even future exercise of human liberty insofar as it is good and real; since it happens that we are free in virtue of the decree which wills that we should be free, the result is that we act freely in such and such an act in virtue of that decree.

A.4. The practical consequences of the St. Thomas' doctrine on grace.

- o A profound humility.
 - The doctrine on grace makes us realize that man has nothing exclusively of his own except sin; he requires the natural aid of God to perform a naturally good act and a soliciting grace to perform a supernaturally good act, even souls far advanced in charity: *Our sufficiency is from God.* (2 Cor 3:5)
 - There is no sin committed by one man which cannot be committed by another given the same circumstances, infirmity of the will, and personal weakness.
- o Continual intimate prayer, profound thanksgiving, and contemplation.
 - Intimate prayer is a grace that must be asked, together with the grace to will it which makes us persevere in struggles.
 - Prayer should be continual, in a sense, since our soul needs a new, actual, and efficacious grace for every salutary act and each new merit; this is a profound effect of the mystical life, as the soul possesses a constant genuine thirst for grace.
 - Prayer of contemplation considers chiefly the profound action of God in us to mortify and vivify, and such is expressed by the perfect *fiat* of abandonment.
 - Efficacious grace is necessary for prayer; mystical union, which is obscure and painful, verifies this, for by it the soul learns by experience what great need we have of grace in order to pray and do good.
- o Perfect practice of the theological virtues.

- This is because of the link between the efficacy of grace and the sublime mystery of predestination; although God does not will that anyone perish, He fixes a certain particular gaze of preference on a number known to Him alone.
 - It is not for us to be disturbed or question whether or not we are of the elect, but rather to pray for the means by which we unite ourselves with Christ's prayer to the Father for us (cf. Jn 17:6ff); this prayer assumes its full plenitude in the life of faith, that is, the mystical life: faith in the wisdom of God, the holiness of divine good pleasure, the divine omnipotence, God's sovereign dominion, and in the infinite value of the merits and prayers of our Lord.
- The doctrine of grace leads to an entirely supernatural hope composed of confidence in the divine mercy and abandonment to it; in order that this virtue be theological and supernatural, we must hope in God and not the power of our free will.
 - This does not mean that we need not work or act (quietism!), but rather act to the best of our ability and, above all, abandon ourselves to God.
 - During passive purification, souls are often tempted against hope and are troubled by the mystery of predestination; it is here that hope is strengthened by an heroic clinging to the assistance of God, that is, efficacious grace that urges us to the practice of goodness and leads to its accomplishment.
- Charity towards God and souls is confirmed.
 - This charity is a friendship based on God's communication to us of the divine life through grace; thus, the more intimate and efficacious the grace, the more we should love God and correspond to His love.
- o St. Thomas' doctrine is supported by the writings of St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, *The Imitation*, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Francis de Sales: *The chains of grace are so powerful and yet so sweet, that though they attract our heart, they do not shackle our freedom. Our yielding to the impulse of grace us much more the effect of grace than of our own will, and resistance to its inspirations is to be attributed to our will alone.* (Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God* II, 12)

The Full Perfection of the Christian Life (ch.4)

- A.1. *Christian perfection, or the beginning of eternal life.*
 - o The life of grace is conceived only by considering, first of all, the life of glory of which it is the seed; similarly, Christian perfection cannot be determined without speaking first of eternal life, of which it is the prelude.
 - o Eternal life in its complete development.
 - The Church teaches that the souls of the blessed in heaven have an intuitive and direct vision of God without the intermediary of any previously known creature (ideas), (cf. *Denp* 530)
 - Such contemplation of God, superior to even finite ideas, will absorb us in God and remain ineffable; by reason of its object, the Beatific Vision excels the most sublime philosophy and the highest natural knowledge of angels, as we see how all the divine perfections are identified in God.
 - The beholding of God, perfect in every way, will immovably fix the will since it is in the presence of its object, and the love of God will be rendered perfect.
 - Thus eternal life consists in knowing God as He knows Himself and loving God as He loves Himself.
 - Careful consideration of this reveals that divine knowledge and love are only possible if God grants the soul participation in His very nature; our sonship by adoption (through grace) is thus a really participated likeness of the eternal sonship of the Word. (cf. IIIa q.3 a.8)
 - o Beginning of eternal life.
 - Spiritual progress can only tend to its end because it presupposes in us the seed of glory, that is, a supernatural life identical in its essence to eternal life (as an acorn becomes an oak because its nature is identical).
 - There are two accidental differences: God is only known in obscurity here on earth and he can be lost by our own fault, unlike Heaven where we behold Him in clarity and which can never be lost.
 - Bodily death is a mere passage from the imperfect state of the supernatural life to its plenitude.
 - Sanctifying grace, received in the essence of the soul, is by its nature imperishable and should last forever and blossom into eternal life; similarly, the gifts of the Holy Ghost which accompany the grace continue to subsist into eternal life.
 - Although in itself this grace is incorruptible, it can be lost through weakness of our free will, by which the soul can render itself incompatible with the presence of grace.
 - Thus, the Holy Trinity dwells in every soul in the state of grace since this state is identical in nature to that of Heaven: *If anyone loves Me, He will keep My word, and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.* (Jn 14:23)

- This is attributed to the action of the Holy Ghost because charity likens us more particularly to the Spirit of love.
 - o The soul with charity possesses a presence of God in a special mode, as the object known is in the knower and the beloved in the lover; since the soul by its own operations of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode, God is said to not only exist by immensity but dwell therein as His own temple, (cf. Ia q.43 a.3)
- o Consequences of the life of grace and charity.
 - Mystical union, that is, the actual, intimate, and almost continual union with God, appears as the culminating point on earth of the development of the grace of the virtues and the gifts, and as the normal (albeit infrequent) prelude to the life of Heaven.
 - As this union belongs to the order of grace, it proceeds *essentially* from the grace of the virtues and the gifts and *not* from graces *gratis datae*.
 - As the life of grace is essentially ordered to that of glory, the normal (though rare) summit of its development should be the very perfect disposition to receive the Beatific Vision immediately after death, the consequence of intense charity.

A.2. Christian perfection consists especially in charity.

- o Erroneous or incomplete doctrines on the essence of perfection.
 - *Greek philosophers* considered that perfection lay especially in wisdom, that is, in a view of all things in virtue of their first cause and last end.
 - *Theosophy* considers perfection to consist in a “consciousness of our own divine identity,” an error that supposes and leads to pantheism, which radically negates the supernatural order and all Christian dogmas, leaving an imposter of imitation and a corruption of Christian asceticism.
 - Some Christians think perfection consists principally in contemplation, which has its origin in the gift of wisdom; this is incorrect in that perfection consists in *charity*, although the loving contemplation of God is a most efficacious means to attain the virtue of charity- (i.e., wisdom is not the principle).
 - *Ultra-intellectualists* regard the study of theology- and its related sciences as the summit of perfection; this, in reality, places union with God as secondary- and robs the interior life of its soul.
 - Hence, perfection would consist in the full development of their personality, seeking it chiefly in a broad, nicely balanced *human culture* that is “well-informed” on actual problems and is careful to grasp those phases of Christianity which are most attractive to a lofty nature.
 - Such knowledge is only superficial at best and they become trapped in a vicious circle of practical naturalism devoid of any vivifying and lasting influence on souls, (cf. Mt 7:26, a house built on sand.)
 - *Activists*, by their natural tendency, consider perfection to consist chiefly in outward activity, or in the fortitude, courage, or patience required of such activity; on the other hand, perfection can be thought to consist especially in austerity, fasting, or other penitential practices.
 - This error confounds the means with the end or inverts the order of means to the end; charity is sacrificed to acts and virtue is made to consist in what is hard simply- rather than what is good and ordered by providence.
 - The *ratio* of greater virtue lies in the good rather than in the arduous, although difficulty springing from the magnitude of the work increases merit, (cf. IaIIae q.114 a.4 ad2; IaIIae q.123 a.12 ad 2; q.155 a.4 ad2)
 - *Mild pietism* considers perfection as especially consisting in the interior and exterior worship of God, in acts of the virtue of religion, in the faithful accomplishment of exercises of piety and the devotion that animates them.
 - This opinion approaches the truth but insufficiently discerns the superiority of the *theological* virtues (which are immediately specified by God) over the *infused* virtues of religion, piety, and devotion which are not directly concerned with God but the worship of Him.
 - St. Francis de Sales issues a warning about this: *Everyone paints devotion according to his own passion and fancy and then to seek a justification of his views. (Intro to the Devout Life, 1)*
- o True solution: Perfection consists chiefly in charity.
 - Scriptural basis.
 - St. Paul’s teaching correlates perfectly to our Lord’s Great Commandment: *Put ye on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved..., but above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection,* (cf. Col 3:12-15)
 - o Charity in a way implies all the virtues subordinated to it, and which appear as many-modalities or aspects of the love of God: *Charity is patient, is kind, envies not, etc.* (1 Cor 13:4-7)
 - St. John: *God is charity, and he that abides in charity, abides in God and God in Him.* (1 Jn 4:16)

- St. Peter: *Before all things, have a constant mutual charity among yourselves: for charity covers a multitude of sins.* (1 Pet 4:8)
- Theological proof of St. Thomas (cf. Hallae q.184)
 - A thing is said to be perfect insofar as it attains its proper end, and is the ultimate perfection thereof.
 - Charity unites us to God, who is the last end of the human mind, since he that abides in charity abides in God and God in him; thus the perfection of the Christian life consists chiefly in charity, (a.1)
 - o This perfection in charity consists primarily in the love of God and secondarily to the love of neighbor, both which are chief commandments of the divine law; this is not commanded according to measure, *so what is in excess of the measure is a matter of counsel*, (a.5)
 - o Thus the evangelical counsels are *subordinate* to charity; the love of neighbor is the secondary object of charity and must be loved for the sake of God.
- Further observations.
 - Charity cannot coexist with grave sin since it is united to our last end which grave sin is opposed to, hence, charity is inseparable from the state of grace while faith and hope are not.
 - Since charity attains God directly and possesses none of the imperfections of faith and hope (which do not exist in Heaven), it will subsist eternally.
- o An objection of intellectualists: *Why is charity superior to our knowledge of God?*
 - The basis of this argument stems from the regard that the intellect is man's first faculty, that is, it directs the others, for the mode of apprehension is prior to the mode of execution (which concerns the will); this leads to the conclusion that the perfection of man lies especially in the intellectual knowledge of God and all things considered in virtue of their cause and end.
 - St. Thomas *admits* that the intellect is superior to the will (which it directs), because the object of the intellect is more universal and absolute (being) than that of the will (the good which, as a modality of being, is a specified and restricted object); since good supposes being, the will presupposes the intellect and is directed by it.
 - Aquinas further states that the Beatific Vision is essentially the *intellectual* and immediate vision of God; beatific love is a consequence of the intellectual recognition of the divine essence as completely good which necessarily draws the will.
 - St. Thomas offers a profound reply to the objection, even in regard to the concessions he makes above, and *this is of prime importance to the study of ascetical and mystical theology.* (1a q.82 a.3)
 - Although one faculty may be by its nature superior to another, it is possible that *an act of the second may be superior to an act of the first* (e.g. hearing a sublime symphony is of a higher order than seeing an ordinary color).
 - Thus in certain circumstances (*secundum quid*) and *with relation to God*, the created intellect in this life remains inferior to the will, hence the love of God is more perfect than knowledge of Him.
 - o The action of the intellect consists chiefly in the idea of the thing understood as being in the one who understands (e.g. truth and error); whereas, the act of the will consists in the will as being inclined to the itself as existing in itself (e.g. goodness).
 - o Hence, it follows that in this life our knowledge of God is inferior to our love of Him since in order to represent Him to ourselves, we impose on Him the bonds of our limited ideas; love of God raises us towards Him, although love must presuppose a certain knowledge and is directed by it.
 - This is further supported by the converse, in that it is better to know inferior things than to love them, for knowing them raises them, in a way, to our intelligence while loving them forces us to stoop towards them (e.g. money).
 - The argument is further supported in consideration of the theological virtues.
 - Charity adheres to God immediately in Heaven, because the act of the cogitative power (intellect) is completed by the thing known being in the knower, whereas the act of the appetitive power (will) consists in the appetite being inclined to the thing itself and resting in it; hence charity is greater than faith or hope because it attains God Himself and rests in Him since it is in the will.
 - Charity establishes in us a sympathy with divine things which are thereby rendered desirable; it unites all the virtues by ordering all their acts to a final end which is its own object, that is, God loved above all. (cf. Hallae q.23)

- o Perfection is a plenitude.
 - Actual perfection consists essentially not in charity alone, but also in the acts of the other virtues which are of precept and ordered by charity.
 - Hence, love of God and love of neighbor, which requires charity, are perfected by the direction of the commandments (which remove things contrary to charity) and the counsels (which remove things that hinder but are not contrary to charity).
 - Any soul possessing sanctifying grace is substantially perfect since it is free from mortal sin, but not *perfect properly* [*perfectio simpliciter*], ascetical and mystical theology deals with this latter aspect of perfection.

A.3. The full perfection of charity presupposes the passive purification of the senses and the soul.

- o This question is concerned about the summit of charity in its normal development, the fundamental law being the law of grace which regenerates us progressively.
- o Doctrine of St. John of the Cross on perfection of charity.
 - To reach the perfection of charity, more than active mortification of the spirit and senses is necessary; despite a soul's generosity, it cannot completely purify itself so that it will be even slightly fit for the divine union in the perfection of love, so thus it requires the direct action of God to do this. (*Dark Night of the Soul* 1, 3)
 - First, the soul is weaned from sensible consolation, which now becomes an obstacle rather than a help; this is done by passive purification of the senses which leads the soul to a state more detached from the senses, imagination, and reasoning.
 - At this time, the Holy Ghost provides the soul with intuitive knowledge despite the painful darkness, which initiates it profoundly into the things of God.
 - Furthermore, heroic acts of charity and patience are required to resist the frequent temptations the soul undergoes.
 - The result of the passive purification of the senses leaves the imagination and the powers of the soul detached from discursive prayer and to spiritual effort, because the soul now tastes, without any intellectual effort (on account of the action of the gifts of the Holy Ghost) a calm and affectionate contemplation.
 - This stage is still incomplete as far as purification goes; venial sins are not deliberate but imperfections incompatible with the full perfection of charity still exist.
 - Proficients are unable to perceive the faults deeply and subtly imbedded in the soul which requires a passive purification of the soul to remove; they suffer from dullness and dissipation of mind, distraction, and can be duped into presumption by imaginary visions or false prophecies (which can be taken as signs of spiritual perfection). (DNS 2, 2)
 - Passage to the next stage (purification of the spirit) is a painful process of severe aridity and dryness; the state of perfection consists in the perfect love of God and contempt of self and this requires both knowledge of God and knowledge of self, that is, the soul needs a preliminary formation in both.
 - To achieve this, God will at times raise the soul by making it taste its own greatness and humble it by showing its baseness.
 - This movement of ascent and descent can only stop after the perfect habit of the virtues has been acquired and the soul has reached union with God. (DNS 2, 18)
 - o During this time, the soul is tempted greatly against the theological virtues which require, in turn, heroic acts of the same theological virtues to resist which consequently augments them.
 - o Accompanying this are illuminations of the gift of understanding that reveal to the soul the unknown depths of the mysteries of faith.
 - The full perfection attainable in this life is found only in the *transforming union*, which is the full development of charity by which the soul accepts with a holy joy any work or suffering whatsoever from God, attributing nothing to self but referring all to God.
 - All Christian virtues at this stage reach their perfect development and are so intertwined and united that their mutual support increases the resistance to any contrary movement, (cf. *Spiritual Canticle* 24)
 - The gifts of the Holy Ghost are possessed in the highest perfection possible here on earth and the operations of a soul in union come from the Holy Ghost; thus all the first movements of a soul's power are divine.
 - Hence, overall according to St. John of the Cross, the illuminative and unitive ways belong to the mystical life which is, no doubt, a lofty conception of what the full development of the graces of the virtues and gifts entails; this is called into question by modern writers who hold that passive purification of the spirit is not necessary on the grounds that it is extraordinary (see next article below).

A.4. According to Tradition, the full perfection of the Christian life belongs to the mystical order.

- o The language of St. John of the Cross differs noticeably from that of modern ascetical writers; the latter fail to hold mysticism to be the consequence of asceticism, and thus they consider six stages of the spiritual life, those being the ascetical-purgative, ascetical-illuminative, etc. with corresponding mystical components, which is wholly foreign to any spiritual writer of Tradition.
 - St. John of the Cross writes for those determined to reach perfection, especially contemplative souls, and thus proposes the loftiest perfection attainable in this life and the best means to reach it, hence explaining his seeming exaggeration on the insistence of mortification.
 - This points out that many souls are often satisfied by a very relative perfection which seems altogether insufficient to others; modern writers seem to have fallen into this sphere of laxity, impoverishing Tradition by confounding the full normal development of the life of grace on earth with what is only in reality its prelude.
 - Carmelite and Dominican theologians teach that all souls should aspire to supernatural (infused) contemplation; according to John of St. Thomas, although the actual inspiration of the Holy Ghost is not within our power, it is within our power to have our heart always ready to obey in order that we may be easily moved by Him (i.e., the Holy Ghost moves us according to our degree of habitual docility), (cf. *Commentary on Iallae* q.68)
 - o With this in mind, however, care must be taken not to confound *vocation* with *predestination*: it is through one's own fault that an adult fails to attain salvation, while he may fail through no fault of his own to attain contemplation, for many are called but few are chosen.
- o Tradition affirms three major criteria in regard to the spiritual life.
 - The mystical life is characterized by a special passivity or predominance of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, having a supernatural mode of the Christian virtues, while never being confounded with the graces *gratis datae*.
 - In the course of the spiritual life, the mystical life normally begins with the passive purification of the senses and the prayer of passive recollection.
 - In principle, a special vocation is not necessary to reach the mystical life, since the grace of the virtues and gifts suffices in itself by its normal development to dispose us to the mystical life (see chapter 6, way down below).
 - However, lack of certain conditions, which are independent of the will, usually result in a longer time of advancement; also, the gifts of action dominate in souls more fitted for the active life.
- o St. Thomas' teaching on perfection.
 - The perfection of the Christian life consists in charity; in this life, perfection consists in loving God to the exclusion of whatever is opposed to Him, which includes mortal sin (directly opposed) and any defects or attachments that hinder the soul from being directed completely towards God. (Iallae q.184 a.2)
 - Hence, those in the perfect state commit venial sins only through frailty or surprise and completely avoid deliberate venial sin and any slight, conscious, and voluntary imperfection.
 - Such souls are very faithful to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and endeavor to perform acts comparable to their degree of charity, including continuous prayer, fervent reception and hunger for the Eucharist, humble confessions, and an ever-exacting practice of the moral virtues.
 - Aquinas notes that while beginners strive to flee sin and movements of concupiscence and while proficients direct their principle efforts towards advancing in the practice of charity and the virtues, the perfect tend above all to union with God and enjoyment of Him. (Iallae q.24 a.9)
 - This union encompasses perfect fraternal charity that ultimately seeks the spiritual good of friends, strangers, and enemies: *But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls, although loving you more, I be loved less.* (St. Paul)
- o The distinction of the three ways owes its origin to the doctrine of Christian contemplation as formulated by Augustine and Dionysius, who applied the to the ordinary Christian life and *did not* designate them as something extraordinary in themselves; Sts. Thomas and John of the Cross build upon this, keeping the senses of the three stages as conceived by the Fathers.
 - St. Augustine considers the degrees of the spiritual life after his consideration of the degrees of the life of the soul: 1) struggle against sin which leads to true virtue; 2) entrance into light, the result of purification; 3) contemplation and union, which permit the enjoyment of the sovereign good. (*De Qualitate Animae* 1, 33)
 - It would be erroneous to separate Augustine's asceticism from his mysticism, for the first is the prelude of the second.
- o The three degrees within the realm of the perfect: relative perfection, heroism, and sanctity.
 - Passive purification of the senses leads to a *relative perfection* where the soul avoids deliberate venial sin.
 - *Heroic virtue* is practiced during the passive purification of the soul, esp. in the theological virtues.

- *Sanctity* is the result of the successful purgation of the soul, a stage of intimate union with God and the perfection and harmonization of the virtues.

A.5. Perfection and the precept of the love of God.

- o Is the first precept without limit?
 - The question here amounts to if, in fact, there is a limit to precept of the love of God, then beyond such a limit there is only a *counseled*, charity in which perfection would consist.
 - Some, including Suarez (cf. *De Statu Perfectionis* 11, 15-16), thought this to be the case (despite the contrary position of Augustine and Aquinas), as a high degree of charity is not necessary to observe the precept perfectly; suppression of deliberate venial sin and voluntary imperfection is only of counsel (lience, perfection is superior to the first precept).
 - A common objection (which many modern theologians make their thesis) to the unlimited quality of the first precept states that if perfection of the Christian life consisted in the precepts, it would follow that perfection would be *necessary* for salvation and all would be obliged thereto.
 - Aquinas endeavors to solve this by drawing a distinction between what perfection *necessarily and essentially* consists in (which applies to all) and what constitutes it *secondarily and accidentally* (which applies to some).
 - o *Necessarily and accidentally*, perfection consists in charity, first in the love of God and second in the love of neighbor.
 - It is obvious that the love of God can have no limit or measure, since we can never love Him to the degree He is lovable.
 - As God is the ultimate end and object of charity (which has no mean), it follows that the precept has no limit in that our charity ought always to grow until death; the path to eternity is not meant to be used as a place of rest and idleness, but to be traveled.
 - Thus all are bound to fulfill the Commandments which are ordered towards the removal of what is wholly contrary or opposed to charity.
 - o *Secondarily and instrumentally (accidentally)*, perfection consists in the observance of the counsels, which function as instruments to attain it, and are not ends in themselves.
 - *Augustine*. Precepts and counsels are well observed when one fulfills them in order to love God and one's neighbor for God (*Enchiridion* 21); hence, our Lord's words to the rich young man to sell what he had and give to the poor and to follow Him in spirit through charity.
 - Thus, perfection is found in the fulfillment of the supreme and limitless precept of the love of God and neighbor.
 - The perfection of charity is prescribed to man in this life in order to direct man to the end, although the manner of its fulfillment can be different; imperfect fulfillment is not necessarily a transgression of the precept, provided the Commandments are observed (which is the way of beginners). (*Augustine, De perfectione iustitiae* 8)
 - However, leveling off in the lowest degree does not fulfill the supreme commandment in all its perfection, and the danger of pusillanimity arises; hence, it is *false* to think that imperfect charity is that which is only prescribed.
 - Thus, the matters pertaining to counsel do fall under precept and as the very least to which the soul must tend.
 - o The perfection of charity is prescribed as an end, and thus we must come to will the attainment of the complete end; the failure to make an effort to mature in the spiritual life reveals a disproportion, just like an adult who fails to cast off his childhood.
 - o Consequences of the precept of the love of God.
 - In the way of perfection, he who does not advance falls back, since any halt in the development of Christian charity is in opposition to the law of the love of God; if a soul fails to progress in the love of God, it reverts to self-love.
 - *Remiss acts of charity* (those proceeding from an inferior intensity to the degree of charity a soul possesses), present three dangers:
 - Although these acts are meritorious (since they proceed from charity), they will only obtain an increase in charity when a more fervent act is performed, (cf. *IIaIIae* q.24 a.6 ad1)
 - Imperfect acts themselves indicate that the soul ought always to progress instead of remaining stationary.

- These acts, if frequent, can create a disposition towards retrogression, as they permit for the rebirth of disordered inclination; hence, charity is not directly diminished in itself by remiss acts, but its influence becomes weakened and is deserving of God's actual graces.
- Every Christian, each according to his condition, must strive for the perfection of charity.
 - In virtue of his vows, a *religious* is placed in a special state of perfection without at once making him perfect; observance of the vows and the imposed rule constitute the path of progress of which no limit can be set.
 - *Secular priests*, although not bound under vows, must tend to perfection on account of the Holy Orders he has received, regardless of whether he has care of souls or not; his familiarity with the Sacred Mysteries demands greater inward holiness than that required of the non-ordained religious.
 - The *laity* must strive for the perfection of charity according to the general obligation of the first commandment, that is, by avoiding mortal and venial sin, acquiring a spirit of the counsels (while not binding himself to anything non-conducive to state), and thus growing in charity until death.
- Thus, all are obliged to strive for *the inward perfection of charity*; exteriorly, because man is not obliged to the doubtful good, he is not obliged to the best.
 - Hence, the precept is fulfilled if one does what he can as required by the conditions of his state of life, provided there be no contempt of doing better things since this would set the mind against spiritual progress.
 - Actual graces are thus progressively offered to the soul proportionate to the end to be attained.

Contemplation and its degrees (ch. 5)

- A.1. *Prayer in general and common prayer.*
 - o The prayer of petition.
 - Prayer is *not* a force with its first principles in ourselves, nor an effort of the human soul trying to make God change His providential disposition.
 - However, it is by the fact that the will of God is immutable that prayer finds its efficacy; true prayer by which we petition with humility for the gifts needed for salvation are efficacious because God so decreed them to be and our Lord promised it.
 - God ordains from all eternity the causes that produce effects in the physical, intellectual, and moral orders; hence, God so wills that prayer be offered to bring about the effects He ordains.
 - God wills the final effect and ordains the means and causes that will produce it; thus God decrees that some of His gifts be obtained (the effect) by the means of prayer (the cause).
 - Therefore, providence does not only have to do with the effect but also the means employed; as the effect of wheat is not obtained unless we sow, so the effects of prayer cannot be obtained without it, as God wills things both necessary and contingent.
 - Prayer is simply a question of raising our will to the level of God's will so as to will with Him what He has decided to give; thus *it is an elevation of the soul to God*.
 - God's will remains immutable; rather, our will is changed and we begin to will in true what God has ordained for eternity, so overall, prayer is in cooperation with the divine government.
 - As Heaven is the goal of the life of the soul, prayer can only obtain for us those things that help to the attainment of our last end, whether spiritual or corporeal.
 - Spiritual good brings us towards heaven directly (grace, virtues, merits, etc.); corporeal goods do so indirectly to the degree that they are subordinated to the spiritual.
 - Prayer must be humble, confident, and persevering, that is, formulated with true desires for what God wishes for us with the recognition of who we are in comparison with God.
 - o Common (mental) prayer.
 - St. Teresa defines mental prayer as nothing other than being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him who loves us. (*Autobiography* 8)
 - Prayer should contain an element of simplicity because of its object, which can be lost due to a clinging to complicated methods which are suitable for a time for beginners (e.g., over-use of a prayer book, certain pious devotions, etc.).
 - Methods are useful at the start to prevent distraction and to acquire habitual recollection, but methods must only be a help/assistance to the goal and should be discarded when no longer useful.

- Prayer must proceed from the love of God and end in Him; study and speculation may yield an intellectual delight but do not necessarily dispose the state of grace (thus the soul can be moved by the love of knowledge rather than the love of God).
 - Prayer should begin with an act of humility, a fundamental virtue, which removes pride and self-love (an obstacle to grace) and leads to adoration, one of the first acts of the virtue of religion.
 - An act of faith should proceed the act of humility, usually by a consideration of some fundamental truth; this does not require a great deal of reasoning since the simple act of theological faith is superior to reason and moves the soul to adoration and love.
 - This leads to an act of hope, since we realize our need for God's help to acquire the beatitude He has promised.
 - Finally, this hope leads to charity, since confidence in God's help makes us reflect that He is good in Himself and not only because of the favors He gives.
 - o The initial movement of charity could be affective, but must ultimately lead to *effective charity* by which the theological virtues tend under divine guidance to fuse into a gaze of super-natural love; this is the early stages of contemplation presupposing an inspiration of the Holy Ghost and His gifts by which charity is increased in proportion to the growth of the soul.
- Hence, mental prayer serves to create a disposition to contemplation; what the soul received from God under the form of grace, it returns to Him under the form of adoration; the *Pater Noster* is the perfect example of this.
- o Attainment to the life of prayer and perseverance in it.
 - Ultimately, prayer depends chiefly on the grace of God and the soul remotely prepares well for it by humility, mortification, and detachment from sensible things and from self; immediate preparation involves the stirring up of charity within the soul.
 - These two combined require perseverance:
 - Perseverance requires hope and trust in God; the soul in a state of grace cannot remain idle but must constantly strive to advance under the inspirations of the Holy Ghost.
 - We must allow ourselves to be led by the road that our Lord has chosen for us, that is, humility and conformity to the divine will.

A.2. Meanings of contemplation, ordinary, and extraordinary.

- o *Acquired contemplation and infused contemplation.*
 - In a non-religious sense, contemplation in general pertains to a simple, intellectual view of truth and accompanied by admiration (cf. Ilallae q.180 a.1, 6)
 - Christian contemplation is founded upon divine revelation and received through faith.
 - *Acquired contemplation* is defined generally as a simple and loving knowledge of God and of His works which is the fruit of our personal activity aided by grace.
 - *Infused contemplation* is contemplation in its proper sense; although we can dispose ourselves to receive it, it is not within our power to produce it at will and is present without our deliberation though not indeed without our consent, that is, a special inspiration of grace.
 - o Infused contemplation is ultimately a science of love, and infused loving knowledge of God.
 - The great spiritual writers do not use the term *acquired contemplation* since they only classify it as infused; hence, many authors are reluctant to use the term, since it is often mistaken as the summit of the ordinary spiritual life, whereas infused contemplation was regarded as extraordinary.
 - As a rule. Cennetite theologians who admit the existence of acquired contemplation do not see it as the normal terminus of spiritual progress on earth, but rather as a proximate disposition to receive infused contemplation.
 - St. Teresa draws a distinction between acquired prayer of recollection (which she calls *affective prayer*) and the moment of first infused prayer.
 - o *Affective prayer* is properly so-called recollection because by its means the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with God.
 - This is not properly a supernatural state, but something which, with the grace of God, we can obtain for ourselves. *Iffay of Perfection*, ch.28-29)
 - o *Infused prayer* (supernatural recollection) is a direct work of grace on the soul by which recollection comes without any work on the part of the soul (but usually presupposes a disposition towards its reception).

- St. Teresa points out further that such prayer is not dependent upon our will and takes place only when God sees fit to bestow it; furthermore, such bestowal only seems to happen to those who have renounced the world.
- This is manifestly a mystical prayer and the beginning of infused contemplation; contrary dispositions can serve to introduce obstacles to this.
- Confusion of acquired contemplation with infused contemplation leads to a form of *quietism*.
- q The ordinary and extraordinary in the supernatural life.
 - Whatever is outside the normal way of sanctity and not at all necessary to its attainment is, strictly speaking, extraordinary (graces *gratis datae*, e.g., prophecy, visions, etc.).
 - Such gifts are granted primarily for the good of others, although they may secondarily help in the sanctification of the soul who receives them, if such a soul uses them with charity.
 - Whatever belongs to the normal way of sanctity and holds for the majority (those things which are absolutely or morally necessary for its attainment) are essentially *ordinary*.
 - Hence, whatever is in the supernatural life is accomplished in accordance with even the superior laws of its full development is ordinary in itself, even though these laws are infinitely more elevated than those of our nature.
 - Care must be taken not to confound what is eminently useful for reaching sanctity in the majority of cases with what is observed in the majority of pious souls (that is, what is common among them, for many are still far from the goal).
 - o Thus, passive purification and infused contemplation are often confused as extraordinary due to their relatively rare occurrence on account of the common mediocrity of souls.
 - o Purgatory after death, though frequent, is not according to the order arranged by God for the full development of the supernatural life; it is in keeping with the order to enter heaven immediately after death after having completed purification while on earth.

\\ 3 Description of infused contemplation and its degrees according to St. Teresa.

- o The mystical state in general.
 - Preparation.
 - The soul must first ordinarily raise itself above sensible things by its own efforts aided by grace; these efforts include frequent acts of humility, faith, hope, and charity, along with meditation on revealed truths.
 - As the soul advances in these, meditation becomes more simple and leads to an active recollection which serves as a disposition to receive the grace of contemplation.
 - *General call* and the *individual call*.
 - The *general call* pertains to our Lord's invitations, e.g., His call to the Samaritan woman to drink of the "living water"; furthermore, He says: *If any man thirst let him come to Me and drink*, thus indicating by the quantifier *any* that such an invite applies to *all*.
 - The *individual or proximate call* pertains to the actions of the Holy Ghost Himself on a generous persevering soul by which He brings it into more intimate union with the life of God.
 - Nature of the mystical state.
 - The mystical state is characterized by an infused and loving knowledge of God, that is, an infused light and love coming to us from the Holy Ghost and from His gifts in order to make us grow in charity.
 - In this state, the soul is no longer inclined to meditate by itself, to reason on the great truths of the Faith in order to arouse love for God; the soul is recollected by God Himself and this is properly the beginning of infused contemplation.
 - o Hence, God suspends the understanding and makes it cease from its acts, enabling it then to comprehend in a moment more than we could in many years; this is described as the soul being taught by God without the sound of words. (*Way of Perfection* 25)
 - o The presence of God is felt, particularly by those who have attained the prayer of union; God is perceived to be present the *effects*, not in Himself or immediately.
 - This infused knowledge and love, which are the superior exercise of the theological virtues under the influence of the Holy Ghost, constitute the *essential foundations* of the mystical life. (Hallae q.180 a.1)
- o The degrees of the mystical state from the fourth to the seventh mansions.
 - The growing intensity of the mystical state is demonstrated by its progressive extension to the different faculties of the soul which are gradually suspended or captivated by God.

- As this happens, passive purification of the senses gives way to passive purification of the spirit, both which denote intensity of the knowledge and love of God.
- Virtue increases with prayer, especially as the obstacles to grace are removed by the aforementioned purifications; progress in virtue (as judged by God) corresponds to the growing intensity of infused contemplation.
 - In the early stages of infused contemplation, only the will is captivated, not the understanding, memory, or imagination; hence *it can be interrupted*^ aridity and trials and temptations against patience or charity which require a salutary counteraction. [Fourth Mansion]
 - Nonetheless, these trials serve to strengthen the moral virtues which regulate the sensitive appetite.
- The prayer of *simple union* captivated all the interior faculties of the soul, all which are wholly directed by God's activity, and thus the soul is no longer troubled by distraction. [Fifth Mansion]
 - St. Teresa observes that this prayer can be incomplete, in that the imagination and memory may still remain free; they are thus to be ignored at this point.
 - In this state, the soul experiences great contrition for its faults, an ardent desire to praise God, and the strength to face every trial in order to serve Him.
- From this, the passive night of the soul increases and trials increase, but past experiences have taught the soul of the benefit derived from these trials; the soul experiences a profound and intense aridity that leaves the understanding obscured and the will restless which renders it incapable of receiving any comfort (since these trials come directly from God). [Sixth Mansion]
 - After ending this, God brings the soul to a profound knowledge of its weakness and of His majesty; partial or complete ecstasy could follow since union with God is so perfect that the operations of the exterior senses is suspended (*although this or any other auxiliary phenomenon is not to be desired*).
- The seventh mansion is entered into after a very painful purification of love, where the soul dies with a desire to die; this state is best described as the *transforming union* by which the soul, under influence of grace, is passively drawn into itself where the Blessed Trinity dwells.
 - This is the full realization of Christ's prayer: *That they may be one as We are one; I in them and them in Me*. (Notice closely how this in no way pertains to ecumenism.)
 - In this state, the soul perfectly exercises the theological virtues and the gifts which have reached their full development; the soul is practically freed from any disorder of the passions and does not commit any deliberate venial sins, although venial *faults* can still occur but are quickly atoned for.
 - Also present is a great forgetfulness of self, a keen desire to suffer in imitation of our Lord, along with the loss of aridities which give way to intense zeal.
- Overall, in St. Teresa's writings, the normal way of sanctity consists in humility and abnegation which prepare the soul for infused contemplation and an increasingly intimate divine union.

A.4. *What infused contemplation does not essentially require.*

- o The different definitions of infused contemplation given by theologians agree on the point that it is above reasoning and in the obscurity of faith, a simple and loving knowledge of God, which cannot be attained by our personal activity aided by grace, but rather demands a manifest, special illumination and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.
- o Pointing out considerations about what it *does not* essentially entail leads to a better understanding of the definition.
 - Infused contemplation is usually not given suddenly or unexpectedly; it is usually granted after a certain preparation when the soul is already recollected.
 - Infused contemplation is not necessarily accompanied by an absolute impossibility to discourse or reason, which would only come from suppression of the imagination.
 - Although infused contemplation cannot be willed as can an act of faith, it is meritorious because of the free consent and docility given to be moved in this way, which proceeds from clarity, the source of all merit.
 - Neither consciousness of being in the state of grace nor a sense of delight is necessary for infused contemplation since neither of these are found in the passive purification of the senses or soul.
 - The feeling of the presence of God is not essential to the mystical state since it is not present during the passive purification of the spirit; the soul still possesses the loving and profound knowledge of God's grandeur but is crushed by it during this time.
 - Contemplation is directly ordained to personal sanctification and usually known only to the person receiving it and to the confessor; hence *it is not a grace gratis datae*, since these are ordered to the sanctification of others.
 - Infused contemplation does not require infused ideas, although these could be concomitant phenomena to this state.

- Infused contemplation does not require an immediate perception of God, which is impossible during this life; no vision inferior to the Beatific Vision can make us know God as He is in Himself (immediate perception), and no created infused idea can manifest Him in this degree (cf. *De Trinitate* 7. q.18 a.1), and thus *contemplation always takes place within the domain of faith*.

A.5. *The essential relation of infused contemplation and of the mystical life with the gifts of the Holy Ghost.*

- o The ascetical life is characterized by the predominance of the human mode of the Christian virtues, which we exercise at will, whereas the mystical life has as its distinctive character the predominance of the divine mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, that is, and infused love and knowledge that cannot be the fruit of our own effort.
- o Relation of the gifts to the acquired and infused virtues.
 - The infused virtues are superior to the acquired virtues by reason of their formal object (frequent repetition vs. sanctifying grace); moreover, the gifts are superior to the infused moral virtues and, although less than the theological virtues, serve to bring them to perfection.
 - * Aquinas defines the gifts as habits (or essentially supernatural, permanent qualities) whereby man is perfected to obey readily the promptings of the Holy Ghost (*Illuminatione* q.68 a.3); acting upon these promptings leads to the practice of the beatitudes.
 - Holy Writ represents the gifts as existing in a stable manner in the just (Isa 11:2); St. Gregory further insists on their permanence (*Moral.* 2, 6)
- o Necessity of the gifts for salvation.
 - The necessity of the gifts of the Holy Ghost springs from the imperfect mode of even lofty Christian virtues in our souls; thus the intervention of the gifts is crucial as the soul advances.
 - Aquinas holds that the gifts are necessary for salvation because of the very nature of the gifts as perfections of man; as the gifts dispose one to the promptings of the Holy Ghost in matters where the promptings of human reason are insufficient, so this indicates a real need for the gifts.
 - In matters directed to the supernatural end (which absolutely surpasses the forces and exigencies of our reasonable nature) to which man's reason moves him, the motion of reason alone does not suffice unless it receives in addition the promptings of the Holy Ghost.
 - Thus, the gifts are necessary to salvation as habitual dispositions to receive divine inspirations, just as sails are ready on a boat so as to be responsive to the winds; the gifts are given as remedies to the defects of folly, ignorance, dullness of mind, and hardness of heart (cf. *Illuminatione* q.68 a.2)
- o Necessity of an increasingly perfect docility to the interior Master.
 - Because our supernatural virtues must be adopted to the human mode of our faculties, they leave us in a state of inferiority with respect to the supernatural end toward which we should advance with greater eagerness.
 - Hence, the Holy Ghost must intervene habitually in our prayer and works in order that they may be perfected:
 - A soul can make progress and advance by the exercise of the virtues (active) or by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, who acts upon man (passive).
 - Thus the soul truly approaches perfection only by a great docility to the Holy Ghost, whose gifts remedy what is essentially imperfect in the human mode of the virtues.
- o The special mode of the Holy Ghost and the progress of charity.
 - In the order of grace, God especially moves the free will of a spiritual man, who is disposed to the divine inspiration by the gifts of the Holy Ghost.
 - This motion produces the exercise of the act, its direction, and specification and leads to the highest acts of the virtues and the gifts.
 - o Faith becomes much more penetrating and contemplative when illumined by understanding.
 - o Hope is transformed into perfect confidence and filial abandonment to Providence when enlightened by knowledge as to the vanity of transitory things.
 - o Charity progresses towards divine union under the illumination of wisdom.
 - Growing elevation of the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost in the various stages of the interior life.
 - All the gifts are related to charity and grow with charity; thus the more intense the interior life, the more influential is the gift.
 - There are three degrees of the gifts: 1) that of *strict obligation*, 2) the *practice of the evangelical counsels*, and; 3) *heroic acts*, the chart below summarizes the qualities of the gifts proper to the degree.

	FIRST DEGREE (obligation)	SECOND DEGREE (counsels)	THIRD DEGREE (heroic)
WISDOM	Shows us the grandeur of God's commandments and gives us attraction to the good.	Makes us see how valuable the counsels are and the possession of them.	Contemplation and union.
UNDER-STANDING	Strengthening faith and growing firmness.	Disclosure of the consistency and sublimity of revealed mysteries.	Penetration of the hidden depths of the divine mysteries.
KNOWLEDGE	Creatures are seen as nothing and are to be used as means to an end.	Use of creatures with moderation and with interior detachment.	Spirit of renunciation impresses value of suffering and humiliations
COUNSEL	Directs in matters of strict obligation.	Inclines toward the generous practices of the the evangelical counsels.	Undertaking of holy works with heroic perfection.
FORTITUDE	Increasing courage to undertake great things for God (magnanimity).	Increasing courage to undertake great things for God (magnanimity).	Irresistible attraction to the things of God.
PIETY	Increasing desire to serve God faithfully.	Even greater desire to serve God faithfully.	Strong inclination to give oneself entirely in the service of God.
FEAR	Inspires horror of sin and arms us against temptations and assaults.	Fosters deep filial respect for God and preserves from presumption.	Leads to practice of perfect renunciation and mortification.

A.6. *The essential character of infused contemplation; how it proceeds from the virtue of faith and the gift of wisdom.*

- o Tradition is clear that the loving knowledge of God characteristic of the gift of wisdom is very different from speculative knowledge.
 - By this special illumination of the Holy Ghost, this loving knowledge supposes a living co-naturality with divine things based on infused charity, that is, a wholly supernatural attraction for God.
 - Such knowledge grows with charity and become more lively, sweet, and penetrating.
- o The gift of wisdom and infused contemplation according to theology.
 - The gift of wisdom is an infused disposition of the intellect, as contemplation is an intellectual act requiring illumination by the Holy Ghost.
 - Wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the eternal law.
 - It belongs to the intellectual virtue of wisdom to pronounce right judgment about divine things after reason has made its inquiry; whereas it belongs to the gift of wisdom to judge aright about them, and such is the result of charity which unites us to God.
 - o Love resulting from charity unites us more closely to God than abstract knowledge; by the experience it gives us, it makes us more and more keenly desire the intuitive knowledge of eternal life.
 - Infused contemplation is obscure because it is superior to both every sensible image and to every distinct idea; this is the very foundation of the mystical state.
 - The human mode of the faculties are annihilated and the Holy Ghost infuses knowledge and love in to the soul in a way unknown to it; because God now teaches the soul, dwelling substantially in it, neither the devil, understanding, nor natural reason can penetrate the soul.
 - Such obscurity is the opposite extreme from what liberal Protestants and agnostics call *unstable wandering of the soul*; every formal heresy destroys infused faith and breaks down charity, and thus only those with correct faith can enter into the realm of true contemplation.
- o Three principle degrees of infused contemplation according to the brilliance of the illumination of the Holy Ghost, (cf. Hallae q.180 a.6)
 - The soul contemplates God in the mirror of sensible things of which He is the Author.
 - Contemplation of God in the mirror of the mysteries of salvation and what follows from them, harmonizing them and passing between them in an oblique movement.
 - Contemplation of God in Himself in the fullness of faith; the soul by this point has risen above the multiplicity of sensible images and ideas and sees (a little indistinctly) the supreme cognoscibility and goodness of God.
 - The movement of the soul in this state is compared to the circular movement of an eagle, which is essentially immobile, possessing neither beginning nor end, not starting from principle in order to reach conclusions.

- In this state, the soul possesses simple intuition of divine truths in the obscurity of faith; such contemplation gives a foreknowledge of divine perfections and how they are identical with each other.
 - As St. Albert the Great states, the soul is so acted upon by God that the soul wishes at any price to be united to Him; however, *since the object [God] is above the «rasp» of the intellect, He does not make Himself clearly known to the intellect and thus the understanding rests on something which is not determined.*
 - This is most fittingly accomplished (and only possible) by grace, because grace is a real and formal participation in the divine nature.
- o Progressive predominance of the divine mode of the gift of wisdom in prayer.
- Before the entrance into the mystical state, the gifts of the Holy Ghost intervene in a manner that may be latent or frequent, or may be manifest but rare; the mystical life begins when it becomes both *frequent* and *manifest*.
 - It is not necessary that the gifts must enter into play every time the soul receives an actual grace; it would be erroneous to confound actual grace with the gifts, since the latter renders us docile without having to deliberate according to the human mode (cf. Iallae q.52 a.2 ad1)
 - The inspiration of the Holy Ghost is a *gratia operans* that we receive with docility and makes us accomplish acts which we would not succeed by our personal efforts. (Iallae q.111 a.2)
 - A specific difference exists between the human mode of the virtues (with the corresponding actual grace) and the divine mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost; this difference rests on the *formal* objective regulation of the act, as whether it proceeds from reason enlightened by faith, or from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost which is superior to all human deliberation.
 - As the soul rises to perfection, the predominance of the superhuman mode of the gift of wisdom can (but not necessarily) become more manifest; regardless, all the lower gifts are evidently under the direction of the gift of wisdom.
- o Whether contemplation proceeds exclusively from the gift of wisdom or also from informed faith.
- The mystical state does not exclude the operation of the theological virtues, but, on the contrary, supposes their most perfect exercise.
 - Infused contemplation is an eminent act of living faith (that is, faith informed by charity and united to the gift of wisdom), an act which proceeds substantially from infused faith with respect to the gift of wisdom.
 - Hence, the theological virtues are superior to the gifts, even though the virtues receive a new perfection from them; thus the operation which proceeds from the virtue perfected by the gift is called a *beatitudo*, (cf. St. Thomas, *Super Isaiam* 11)
- o The fruits of the Holy Ghost and the beatitudes.
- The fruits differ from the gifts and virtues in that they are not habits, but acts which proceed in us from the influence of the Holy Ghost and which man delights in.
 - The beatitudes are higher still, designating certain acts of the present life which, by reason of this very special perfection, are the pledge, meritorious cause, and first-fruits of perfect beatitude, (cf. Iallae q.70 a.2)
 - Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek *pertain to the flight and deliverance from sin.*
 - Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for justice; blessed are the merciful *pertain to the active life of the Christian.*
 - Blessed are the dean of heart; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake *correspond to the contemplative life.*

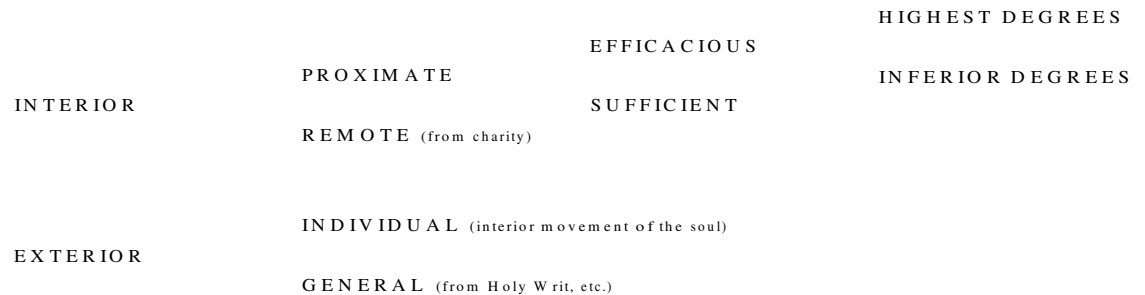
The call to contemplation or to the mystical life (ch.6)

- A.1. The different meanings of the word "call."
 - o Vocation may be either *exterior* (coming through the Gospel, preaching, direction, reading) or *interior* (by reason of a light of grace and attraction, e.g., the priesthood, religious life).
 - o The interior vocation may be either *proximate* or *remote*.
 - Since the habitual grace of the virtues and gifts (which all the just possess) reaches its plenitude of its normal development in the mystical life (as has been established), all the just are called to the mystical life in a *remote manner* (cf. Matt 11:28; Jn 7:37ff; *Way of Perfection* 19, 20),
 - Not all souls receive the *proximate call* to mysticism; three signs are indicative of such a call (see A.3 below for greater detail): 1) meditation becomes impracticable; 2) the soul has no desire to fix its imagination on any particular interior or exterior object, and; 3) the soul takes delight in being alone with God and fixing its loving attraction upon Him.

The proximate call can be either *efficacious* or *sufficient*, and is sometimes delayed (like that of the eleventh-hour laborers); the call is considered sufficient in the sense that not all respond to it (cf. Matt 22:2-10 on the wedding feast).

- o An efficacious call to the mystical life *does not* necessarily mean a vocation to the highest degree of mysticism; this is dependent on the divine will and on the fidelity of the soul in the order of execution, as God disposes freely of the degree of union, as He disposes freely of the degrees of the Beatific Vision. (la q.23 a.5)
- o Analogously, because many acorns do not produce oaks, we cannot deny that the acorn is ordered to the production of the oak; even when planted, favorable external conditions are necessary for its growth and maturity.

CALL TO THE MYSTICAL LIFE



A.2. The general and remote call to mystical contemplation.

- o The basic principle of the mystical life is the same as that of the common interior life, that is, sanctifying grace (charity).
 - Sanctifying grace manifests itself in the interior ascetical life according to the human mode of the virtues and in the mystical life in accordance with the supernatural mode of the gifts which predominate it.
 - The gifts grow with charity which has no limit, and so the soul must possess charity in corresponding degree as the gifts (which are habitual dispositions to grace); as charity increases, so does the human mode of the soul's activity become subordinated to the divine mode of inspiration (*I must decrease and Christ increase*).
 - Thus the gifts remedy the imperfection of the human mode of the virtues by joining themselves to the virtues and transforming them; habitual facility is supernaturalized and the virtues are no longer exercised without the cooperation of the gifts.
 - Mysticism is thus indicative of the full development of the virtues and gifts received in Baptism: perfect abandonment, pure charity, equally lively faith, and complete docility to the Holy Ghost; this shows clearly that the common interior life contains the seed of the mystical life.
 - By the progress of charity, we merit *condignly* the superior degrees of the gifts of the Holy Ghost (considered as dispositions) connected with charity, while *congruously* we can merit the actual inspirations that correspond to the superior degrees of the gifts.
 - Hence, there is no sanctity without the heroism of the infused virtues connected with charity, for the Holy Ghost ordinarily moves a soul according to the degree of its habitual docility; heroic virtue is proved in four ways, indicating a high degree of charity (Iallae q.68 a.3 ad2):
 - o The matter must be difficult and above the common strength of man.
 - o The acts must be accomplished promptly and easily.
 - o The acts must be accomplished joyously.
 - o The acts must be accomplished often and when the occasion presents itself.
- o In the progress of the interior life, the purification of the soul is not complete without the passive purifications, which belong to the mystical order.
 - Progress of the interior life is effected by purification from sin and its consequences, along with imperfections, either actively by our own mortifications or passively by the action of God on the senses and the soul.
 - God almost immediately bestows the grace of passive purification of the senses on persons who are habitually recollected (cf. *Dark Night of the Soul* 1, 8); entrance into this state is marked by inactivity of the imagination, loss of discursive mode of prayer, under which God provides His grace void of sensible manifestations in order to detach the soul from consolation and root out imperfections.

- o The purification of the senses sets the stage for the appearance of spiritual graces and the emergence of the contemplative gifts; hence the object of this purification is the perfect subjection of the passions to the intellect and the will.
- The object of the passive purification of the soul is the full subjection of the spirit to God and the perfect refinement of the moral and theological virtues.
 - o Such purification is granted to souls who have made progress and is intended to remove habitual imperfections of which we are generally unaware; the suffering is such that the soul believes itself crushed under an immense weight, especially with the knowledge of its miseries and imperfections, reckoning that it will never possess God.
 - o Such a purification is *indispensable* from union with God in glory, for it liberates humility and purifies the theological virtues, obliging the soul to the performance of meritorious acts which lead to greater charity.
- o The end of the interior life is the same as that of the mystical life, but the mystical life prepares the soul more immediately for it.
 - The normal summit for the development of the life of grace on earth (although rare) should be a very perfect disposition to receive the light of glory immediately after death without passing through purgatory.
 - The contemplation of God is not a means to the moral virtues and active works, but is rather the end to which these are subordinated; the theological virtues not only have God as their end, but also as their object, and these are exercised most perfectly in the contemplative life (although it must be remembered that *chastity* is the essence of perfection, so an active life can admit of perfection.)
 - The contemplative life, superior to the active life, exists fully in the mystical life; however, even though many are called to an active life which makes some of the highest forms of contemplation inaccessible, such a call does not make the *substance* of the contemplative life inaccessible, for all are called to this.
 - Those in the active life are bound to accomplish the duties of state out of love for God, to be more closely united to Him, and to make Him known and loved; hence the mystical life should be the living source of its action.

A.3. *The individual and proximate call to contemplation.*

- o There are three principle signs of a proximate call to contemplation.
 - *Meditation becomes difficult or even impracticable.* The imagination becomes inert, while a tastelessness for discursive meditation appears that renders the sweetness formerly produced by the object of the imagination dry.
 - *The soul loses any inclination to deliberately fix the imagination or senses on any particular interior or exterior object.* Since difficulty in meditation can be the result of illness, distraction, or the like, this second sign is of the utmost importance in discernment of such a call, but is not conclusive.
 - *The soul delights to be alone with God, fixing its attention lovingly on Him:* The soul does not make any particular considerations and enjoys an interior peace and an impression of repose and quiet; this sign makes the call conclusive, for melancholy or a similar disposition could be the cause of an appearance of the second sign when, in reality, it is not present.
- o Obstacles to the proximate call.
 - *Lack of docility to the remote call.* It is evident that not all souls are faithful in avoiding as they ought both mortal and venial sin and are not generally docile, according to one's state, to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost; such a habitude usually prevents the introduction and perception of a proximate call to high perfection and mystical life (this also clearly shows that God desires our cooperation in these matters and has little taste for quietism!).
 - *Insufficient spiritual development that renders the soul unprepared for the mystical life.* This is the result of insufficient humility, purity of heart, recollection, and generosity, which can be the result of an overly outward-minded inclination or a disproportionate absorption in study or cares of administration that strangles the love of silent and profound prayer.
 - *Discouragement after the first steps in the dark night, even after perception of a proximate call:* Part of this results from bad direction from spiritual directors who prescribe poor remedies that stifle the soul from advancing beyond discursive acts and those of the imagination, even when God formally manifests His desire that the soul advance beyond these.
 - *Failure to advance beyond the lower degrees of the mystical life:* This is usually the result of a lack of generosity on the part of the soul or a lack of decent spiritual direction.
- o Varieties of the proximate call.
 - The parable of the sower demonstrates that there are good souls which yield thirty-, sixty-, and hundred-fold, all which indicate the attainment of varying degrees of the mystical life.

- St. Teresa counsels humble aspiration to be among the elite; only the saints, after generously using the time of trial, reach the plenitude of the perfect age, although not all attain to the supreme heights of sanctity (consider a forest with many mighty oaks, although some are taller than others). (*Interior Castle, Fifth Mansion* 1)
- It is true that although certain souls, whatever their capacity, have attained union, all do not possess this union in the same degree, for it is reserved to the free disposition of God to determine the degree of union.
 - God often searches in vain for souls with good dispositions for union, for many flee from the trials and suffering He sends which were really ordered towards their advancement had they persevered.
 - Overall, the doctrine that all souls which possess charity have remote and sufficient helps to reach the mystical life offers no greater difficulties when compared with the doctrine that *all* men receive sufficient help (at least remotely) to save their soul.

A.4. The conditions ordinarily required for infused contemplation.

- o Do generous interior souls generally lack the principle conditions ordinarily required for the mystical life?
 - Some writes object to the mystical life being the summit of the life of grace and the virtues based on the following *concrete and pragmatic* observations:
 - Only a few souls are in an appropriate environment where silence, solitude, and long hours of prayer are the rule, such as a Carthusian or Carmelite monastery.
 - If such an atmosphere is lacking, the soul would then require a special temperament inclined to recollection and prolonged prayer; many evidently lack such a temperament.
 - A soul must be afforded appropriate spiritual guidance that directs it more and more towards the contemplative life.
 - Finally, it is obviously difficult even for consecrated souls or priests in active orders or for those bound to administrative duties or intellectual work by state to be afforded the conditions for mystical union.
 - The reply to these objections has three considerations:
 - If the conditions enumerated in the objections were required, the conclusion would be that the *realisation* of the summit of the interior life is difficult, but such *subjective factors* do not detract from the *objective finality* of the life of grace.
 - o Although calm temperaments (e.g., melancholy) are of better disposition to contemplation, an agitated spirit (e.g., choleric) does not disqualify a soul from reaching the summit either.
 - o Although those with an agitated spirit are more apt for the active life, they can prepare themselves for the contemplative life by practice of the active life; similarly those who are adapted towards contemplation can utilize active works to increase their aptitude, and thus all ought to tend toward contemplation as the prelude of eternal life. (Hallaes q.182 a.4 ad3)
 - All the means are provided by the Church to foster preparation for the grace of contemplation, and such means are at everyone's disposal; these necessarily include careful reception of the Sacraments, daily Mass, love of the Eucharist, devotion to the Holy Ghost, and recourse to the Sacred Heart and Blessed Mother, of whom contemplation is a fruit of true devotion.
 - o Liturgical prayer recited with recollection in union with the Church obtains inspirations which inflame and enlighten our hearts.
 - o Frequent reading of Holy Writ and study of sacred doctrine when undertaken in a supernatural manner can further provide means for the preparation of contemplation:

lectio divina studiunrl · meditatio ^ oratio contemplatio
 - There are five primary dispositions indicative of the proximate individual call to contemplation:
 - o *Purity of heart.* This is the fruit of exterior and interior mortification, which detaches us from sin, condemns our faults, and is indicative of a readiness to endure sufferings and purifying trials.
 - o *Simplicity of spirit.* This is born from purity of heart and is indicative of our ability to see God in all things, persons, and events, either good or bad, realizing that they are willed or permitted by God for His glory; this is a result of a development of wisdom and is displayed by great rectitude of life.
 - o *Humility of heart.* This is born from the previous two and pertains to absolutely convinced realization of the distance separating the infinite perfection of God from the nothingness of creatures; a love to be nothing in order for God to be all.

- o *Love of recollection, fidelity to the grace of the present moment, and perseverance in prayer* This is contrary to the overwhelming spirit of naturalism and the activism which leads therefrom; the healthy reaction against these should be the impetus for the raising of contemplative souls.
 - *Tanler*: I live among the plague of materialism, the desire for God, who is man's end, still persists in men's hearts, with the result that more than ever before there is an indefinable weariness in the world; souls are suffering and dying for this unconscious desire for the infinite.
 - o *Fervent charity towards God and neighbor*: The love of God for man unites us to Him and the gifts of the Holy Ghost (the principles of infused contemplation) develop charity.
 - o Particular obstacles to contemplation.
 - Obstacles always arise from some inordinate attachment either in the intellect or the voluntary.
 - *Obstacles pertaining to the intellect*: These usually consist in the attempt at acquiring self-knowledge in such a way that distracts the soul's attention from God, and makes itself the object of attention; this often involves an effort to see if their prayer conforms to the descriptions of the mystical author to see how "high" a degree they have reached or by leaving themselves in abstract speculations that fail to consider the love of Christ (which can lead to theosophical or Buddhist contemplation).
 - *Obstacles pertaining to the voluntary*: essentially, these consist in the soul's desire to go to God by using means of their own selection and counting much on their own activity rather than permitting God to work; this often leads to an enjoyment in accidental things of God rather than God Himself
 - o What should be thought of souls that have only received one or two talents?
 - Even though divine intimacy would be difficult, the means provided, coupled with the fact that the least degree of grace is sufficient to resist any degree of concupiscence, makes contemplation possible for those with lesser talents than others (cf. IIIa q.62 a.6 ad3; Cajetan *Comm. in Iallae* q.109 a.9 n.4)
 - o Is this doctrine of a nature to lead some souls to presumption and others to discouragement?
 - Aquinas addresses this question to the objection against the expediency of taking a vow (IIaIIae q.88 a.4 ad2).
 - If danger arises from the vow itself, the vow is not expedient (e.g., imprudence, rashness, etc.); but if the danger is attributed to man's failure by infirmity, the vow remains expedient, or else one would be forced to desist from all good things since they may become dangerous accidentally.
 - Thus, in the same way, there should be no fear in leading fervent souls humbly to desire the true mystical life just because of the presence of false conceptions.
 - Presumption and discouragement are remedied by humility, detachment, and magnanimity, respectively; however, by reason of the connection of the virtues, profound humility is impossible without great magnanimity and detachment.
 - The false doctrine that leads to presumption holds that *all interior souls are called proximately and individually to the mystical life* (as opposed to all being called remotely); this leads to quietism as one can be erroneously convinced that he has reached the contemplative stage even though the prerequisite signs are not present.
 - The false doctrine that leads to discouragement maintains that interior souls are not generally called, *even remotely*, to the divine intimacy of the mystical life; thus many souls remain in the lower stages, despite their generosity, which leads to despair of reaching divine intimacy.
 - The truth is in the mean, whereby the soul endures the passive purifications of the senses and the soul whereby it is humbled profoundly; as a result, this leads to a profound desire to grow in charity, divine wisdom, and all the gifts.
 - o Some theoretical difficulties.
 - *Can the grace of contemplation be merited?*
 - The degree of glory and the corresponding degree of charity at the hour of death depend on God's good pleasure; similarly, neither the first grace nor that of final perseverance can be merited.
 - However, if God *gratuitously* places a soul in the order of grace and maintains it therein, then the laws of this order apply to that soul, especially belief in the truths necessary for salvation and for the possession of supernatural love (charity); possession of all the other gifts and virtues is founded upon these things.
 - o Therefore, a soul in this state can merit *condignly* (out of justice) the increase of charity, of the virtues, and the habitual disposition (*habitus*) of the gifts.
 - We cannot condignly merit the efficacious help that maintains us in a state of grace because the principle of merit cannot fall under merit; since infused contemplation is an act that supposes an efficacious actual grace, Thomists (as opposed to Molinists) conclude that infused contemplation can

only be merited *congruously*, although this grace presupposes a high degree of the gifts of understanding and wisdom, considered as a *habitus* and merited condignly.

- o The infusion and increase of grace require an aptness, since no form or perfection is produced in a subject unless the subject is disposed for it; this disposition is the result of God's action on the soul, since grace and charity infinitely exceed our natural capacities and dispositions.
- o Supernatural acts therefore both merit and physically prepare for the augmentation of charity.

An the requind conditions normal?

- It is difficult to reach infused contemplation if many of the conditions enumerated above are missing; humility and ardent charity can supply for this lack, especially if enjoined with great devotion to Mary and the Sacred Heart.
 - o Nevertheless, knowledge of the normal way of sanctity and the full development of the life of grace is reached by considering how grace grows in principle *per se* in suitable conditions; no great distance separates the perseveringly fervent Christian life from the conditions required for the mystical life.
 - o Therefore, conditions required for the mystical life can be found in both contemplative orders and fervent active orders, and even in Christian marriage when it is truly as it ought to be (since all depend on the generosity of soul).
 - o Unfavorable surroundings can prompt salutary reaction in good souls (e.g., overwhelming pride demonstrates humility, avarice shows worth of the spirit of poverty); divine mercy often compensates for the inequality of natural conditions by great graces while deep humility supplies for other conditions in the life of union with God.
 - The conditions of the mystical life which seem abnormal to nature (e.g., the habitual mode of acting characteristic to the mystical state, passive purification) are not abnormal to nature that is regenerated and fed by grace, nor to a Christian life taken seriously; hence Lk 9:29: *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*
 - o Fallen nature only rises again to its normal state by way of *gratia sanans*.
 - God is prompt in giving the grace of contemplation to those who are prepared for it, while man is slow in preparation by want of humility and abnegation.
 - o In the order willed by God, purification should be undergone in this life with the resulting merit instead of in purgation.
 - It is not only charity which in perfect souls is the normal prelude to the Beatific Vision, but charity accompanied by the virtues of a purified soul, the empowerment of the gifts, and the fulfilling of the beatitudes.
- o Venial sin and imperfections: obstacles to divine union.
- Venial sin that is deliberate, in a sense, holds the gifts of the Holy Ghost bound which prevents them from displaying their effects; venial sin is opposed to the fervor of charity necessary for the advancement in the interior life and consequently binds the operation of the gifts.
 - Venial sin cannot be ordained to the end of charity for it is a disordered act in the order of means.
 - Imperfections pertain to morally good acts which can be ordained to the end of charity, but which lacks a certain perfection suitable to spiritual progress; imperfect acts are opposed only to a counsel, which in itself does not oblige, unlike sin which is a transgression of a precept with respect to the matter of the precept.
 - *Imperfectio ex genere suae*. An imperfection that, even when deliberate, *does not become a venial sin*, such as a supernatural and meritorious act performed with an inferior degree of clarity that a soul may possess or natural acts that are not forbidden but are not in accord with spiritual progress (e.g., certain amusements).
 - o *It is unlawful to omit something which is truly better for us according to state for the sole motive that we are not obliged to it and that we wish to use our liberty.*
 - *Imperfectio ex levissima materia*. An imperfection whose matter and object involved is so slight that deliberation on it is not even obliging.
 - *Imperfectio ex imperfectione actus*. An imperfection that is committed through lack of attention or deliberation (although not negligence!), such as acts good by reason of their object but accomplished in an involuntary or mechanical fashion (e.g., reading the Office by rote), the very first disordered movements of sensuality, or acts committed out of invincible ignorance.

- Imperfections disappear with the growth of a more perfect charity, characterized by a greater delicacy toward God and our neighbor, accompanied by the gifts of the Holy Ghost in a proportionate degree.
 - Proficients are subject to distractions and dissipation of mind, sometimes using their spiritual goods in a manner that is not very interior; *noproficient is exempt from many natural affections and imperfect habits* which must be purified by the action of God before divine union can be attained. (*Dark Night of the*

A.5. Extraordinary graces that sometimes accompany infused contemplation.

- o Extraordinary graces generally belong to the charisms, that is, *gratia gratis datae*, and are enumerated by St. Paul (1 Cor 12:4, 7-11); however, charity and sanctifying grace are much more excellent than the charisms, as the former are ordained directly to the union of the soul with God whereas the charisms are chiefly for the benefit of our neighbor, (cf. *lallae q.111 a.4*)

CHARISMS	GRACES THAT GIVE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE THINGS	FAITH, or special certitude as to principles	
		WORD OF WISDOM, on the principle conclusions known through the first cause	
		WORD OF KNOWLEDGE, on the examples and effects which manifest the causes.	
			GIFT OF HEALING
	GRACES THAT CONFIRM DIVINE REVELATION	BY WORKS	GIFT OF MIRACLES
			DISCERNING SPIRITS
		BY KNOWLEDGE	PROPHECY
	GRACES THAT AID IN PREACHING GOD'S WORD		GIFT OF TONGUES
			GIFT OF INTERPRETATION OF SPEECHES

- o Divine revelations.
 - Divine revelations are the supernatural manifestation of a hidden truth by means of a vision, a word, or a prophetic instinct, all which presuppose the gift of prophecy.
 - Such revelations are *public* if made by the prophets, Christ, and the Apostles, and are thus applied to all since these are proposed by the Church and preserved in Holy Writ and Tradition.
 - Revelations are *private* if they are ordained only for the benefit of those who are favored with them and are never considered to be belonging to the *depositum fidei*, the Church, by approving them, simply declares that they contain nothing contrary to Scripture or Church teaching and that they may be proposed as probable to the pious belief of the faithful.
 - o *Properly so-called.* These disclose secrets about God or His works, such as some trial that will befall a nation or person; such revelations can be counterfeited by the demonic also, who begin first by nourishing the soul with truths and likely things that an angelic intellect can ascertain, so thus the utmost and prudent caution is to be exercised in making an assent.
 - o *Improperly so-called.* These disclose a greater understanding of supernatural truths already known by faith; these are associated with infused contemplation since the soul in such a state possesses a union with God by which He reveals these truths by penetrating the substance of the soul in a most profound way which cannot be simulated by the demonic.
 - The soul receiving divine revelations should with humility and simplicity communicate it in a few words to its spiritual director, but should not become attached to it in order to avoid misinterpretation; such revelations should /zww'be asked for, as this inclination can take away the purity of faith, lead to presumption, and lead to many errors, leading the soul away from infused contemplation. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel* II, 11, 16,17)
 - The Holy Ghost enlightens the intellect according to the measure of its recollection; the most perfect recollection takes place in faith, which a desire for revelations would militate against.

o Visions.

- Visions pertain to revelations when they disclose hidden things; otherwise, they are distinguished from them.
 - *Sensible* *corporeal visions*'. These generally represent our Lord, the Blessed Mother, or the saints; these are not necessarily signs of great virtue but are granted to beginners at times in order to detach them from worldly tilings, although they can sometimes be confused with illusions of the imagination or demonic influence.
 - o In any case, prudent consultation with the spiritual director is necessary to ascertain authenticity and, if the visions are true, the soul should be faithful in reaping the benefits God extends by such a favor.
 - *Imaginary*. These are produced in the imagination by God or by angels and are granted when a person is either awake or asleep.
 - o Dreams that are of a divine origin should not contain anything contrary to revealed doctrine or good morals and can be ascertained as such based on the following criteria: 1) when they cannot be produced or dismissed at will, but come suddenly and last but a short time; 2) when they leave the soul in great peace, and; 3) when they produce fruits of virtue.
 - o A vision granted to a cognizant person is almost always accompanied by at least a partial ecstasy to enable the soul to distinguish the interior apparition from external impressions and because of the loss of contact with external things.
 - *Intellectual*. These are certain manifestations of an object to the intellect (God, spirits, material things) without any actual dependence on sensible images that makes the soul see and penetrate the mystical meaning of the object in question.
 - o Such visions are brought about by acquired ideas supernaturally coordinated or modified, or by infused ideas which are sometimes of the angelic order, (cf. Hallae q.173 a.2 ad2; *De Vert.* q.12 a.12)
 - o Divine origin is determined from the effects, such as deep peace, holy joy, profound humility, and unshakeable attachment to virtue.
 - o Such visions cannot attain the divine essence as it is but only by a certain manner of representation through the medium of infused ideas.

o Supernatural words.

- Supernatural words are manifestations of God's thought which are heard either by the exterior senses, the interior senses, or directly by the intellect.
 - *Imaginary supernatural words* are heard by the imagination when either asleep or awake; these are not easily forgotten and seem to remain graven on the memory, and are distinguished from our own words by the fact that they are not heard at will and that they are actually words and works at one and the same time.
 - *Intellectual words* are heard directly by the intellect without the intermediary of the senses or imagination (similar to inter-angelic communication), and suppose a divine light and the coordination of pre-existent acquired ideas and, at times, infused ideas (1a q.107 a.1; *Ascent of Mount Carmel* II, 28-31).
 - o *Successive*'. These are produced only in the state of recollection by the action of the Holy Ghost, characterized by a facility of new understanding with an increase of charity and humility.
 - o *Donnai*. These are so-called because the soul realizes formally that they are uttered by another without any contribution on its part and can hear them when not recollected; characterized by the explanation of some teaching or command, and are free from illusion since the understanding cannot contribute anything to them and the devil is unable to act directly on the intellect.
 - o *Substantial*'. These are formal locutions which effect immediately what they announce by the direct action of God (e.g., God's command to Abraham to walk before Him and be perfect, as written in Gen 17:1).
- In all cases (except formal substantial intellectual words by which the effect clearly makes the cause known), prudent counsel and circumspection must be sought to determine the origin; demonic origin will always leave the soul feeling restless and uneasy.
- In every case, this phenomenon is not to be asked for or desired.

o Divine touches.

- Divine touches pertain to the divine action on the will which reacts on the intellect and gives a very lofty and sweet intellectual penetration of God. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel* II, 32)

- The very substance of the soul experiences things only through the faculties of the will and the intellect; but as God holds the soul in existence. He can from within touch and move the very foundation of the faculty by a spiritual contact which reveals itself as divine.
- Passive acceptance in humility is incumbent on the soul, as these touches serve to unite the soul passively to God.

A.6. *Confusions to be avoided in expounding the traditional doctrine.*

- o Affective prayer, or the acquired prayer of recollection, should not be confounded with supernatural recollection.
- o A charism should not be interposed between the initial mystical state and what essentially constitutes simple union, complete union, and transforming union, since the latter is the summit of the life of grace and the virtues begun at Baptism.
- o The essence of these supernatural mystical states should not be confounded with the extraordinary facts which sometimes accompany them.
- o The three traditional ways (purgative, illuminative, unitive) should not be confused with what is only an imperfect form of them (thus the purgative requires passive purification; infused contemplation for the illuminative; the transforming union for the completion of the unitive).
- o Divine touches must not be likened to revelations and visions which are, properly speaking, extraordinary and exterior facts, nor are these to be confounded with the emotions of the sensible faculties.
- o An attempt at a material and mechanical exactness cannot be applied to spiritual matters, for such matters should only be approached in consideration of higher principles, especially on the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas and the other great mystical writers.

*If such a universal writer as St. Thomas Aquinas does not speak of mystics as a particular class,
is it not because, for him, as for the Areopagite, all Christians are de jure mystics... ?*

*And if he never mentions a separate body of mystical doctrine,
is it not because, for him, there is no mystical doctrine distinct from the common deposit of faith?*

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*Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt qui aedificant eam.
Sit nomen Domini benedictum in saecula. Amen.*

ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

A compiled outline based on the ascetical treatise
Christian Perfection and Contemplation by Rev. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.,
in accordance with the writings of Sts. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John of the Cross,
Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales and other reputable spiritual authors of
antiquity and Tradition, so recognized by the authority of the Church.

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Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus retribuit mihi?
A.D. MMIII